

*Caption on the reverse of this picture reads: "School House on the White Marsh Road 6 miles from Suffolk, Va., built about 1882 by Col. Hugh Morrison & Joel H. Brinkley and others." This school stood at the intersection of White Marsh and Badger Roads.*

## School Days in Nansemond County

"Prior to the Civil War there were no public schools in Virginia as we know them today. Private academies, church schools or individual tutors gave educational instruction to a favored portion of the population. . . .

A new Virginia State Constitution was adopted in 1870 which provided for the establishment of a state wide system of schools. From 1870 to 1900 the growth of the public schools under this plan was exceedingly slow. Many prominent people opposed universal education and shortage of funds was a serious drawback. As compared with present standards of teacher training and equipment the public schools of this period were pitifully inadequate. A few persons managed to secure a fair education but a large proportion of the school population barely learned to read and write."

From *Nansemond County and Suffolk, Virginia: History and Geography*, by Nansemond County and Suffolk City School Boards and the Suffolk Chamber of Commerce 1928. \*\*\*

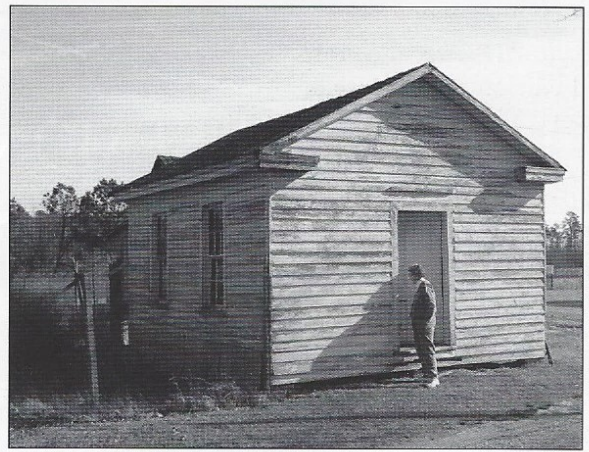
The requirement that counties provide education did not cause an immediate program on the part of the county to build schools all over the county. It appears that many of the schools used in the period between 1870-1900 were built by individuals (or groups of neighbors) on their own land with, perhaps, a teacher furnished by the county. Maybe because they were privately owned an amazing number of these early country school buildings still stand.

Of course, before school buses, schools were located every few miles because children had to walk to school unless they were fortunate enough to have the use of a pony, mule or goat cart.

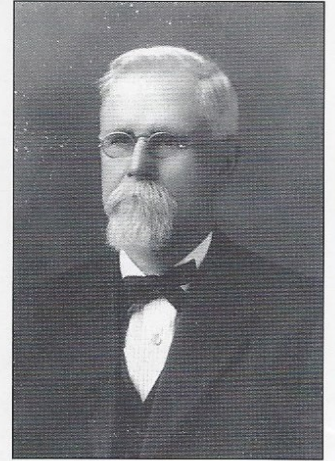




*This is believed to be an old school which was moved to Saunders Station on White Marsh Road. It is now a residence. Photo courtesy Andy Franklin*



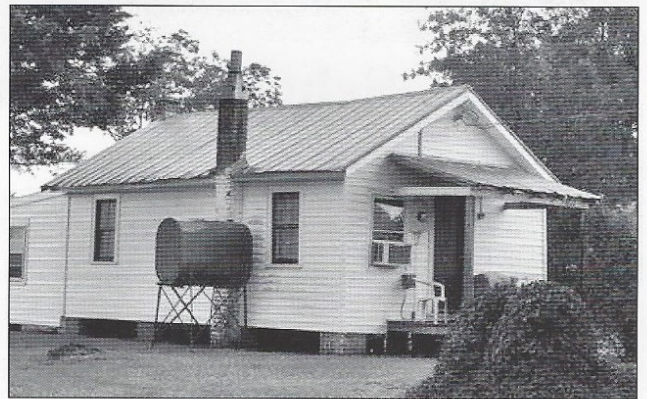
*The school above, in the South Quay area, was built by Robert Rawls (right). When it was no longer in use as a school, he moved it near his house to use for storage. It still stands. Photos courtesy Nita Watterson*



The school year was short and had to be tailored to the growing season. Even then, if there was work to be done farm children were likely to stay at home to help. The late Maude Holland March Ashburn taught in the one room Myrtle School the last years that it operated. In an interview several years ago Mrs. Ashburn spoke of children walking to school barefoot as long as the weather was not really cold.

Supplies were minimal and facilities very basic. A wood burning stove provided heat, windows provided light and air. Restrooms were outside privies. Water would come from a pump or in a bucket from the nearest farmhouse. Lunch came in a pail—maybe a cold biscuit from breakfast or a sweet potato from supper the night before. Rain or shine teachers and pupils were responsible for getting themselves to school though it might be a mile or more away.

***Centennial School** (right) (built in 1876?) on the Somerton Road, operated into the early 20th century. It is now a home on the Old Somerton Road near Turlington Road.*



*Photos by Dana Adams*



***Franklin Grove School**, believed to have been built in the 1860s, originally stood at the intersection of Desert and Deer Forest Roads. Now, with many additions it is a home on Desert Road at the North Carolina line.*

*Despite years of neglect **Baines Hill School** on Adams Swamp Road still stands.*





"The decade from 1900 to 1910 marks the beginning of the realization of the ideal of our County, State and Nation that safety of our social and political institutions depends largely upon offering every boy and girl an opportunity to secure not only an elementary education but a high school education also.

The children of Nansemond County are relatively thinly scattered over a large area. To place schools reasonably convenient to all of its pupils calls for an expensive duplication of teachers, buildings and equipment as compared with the expense of educating children in the more densely populated areas. In order to overcome this handicap as much as possible the schools have been consolidated and pupils transported by thirty-three motor busses. Prior to 1920 there were twenty-six white schools. Only three of these were high schools and the enrollment in each was very small. The remaining twenty-three schools were of the following types: ten one room, three two room, two three room, one four room, and seven five room. None of the twenty-three were accredited or standardized by the State Department of Education. The length of term for these schools ranged all the way from six to nine months." 1928 \*\*\*



*Crittenden School (left) was constructed in 1908 for white students through high school,\* later just junior high. The school closed in 1942. It still plays a vital role as a community center. (vintage photo)*

*\*according to The River Binds Us by the people of Crittenden, Eclipse and Hobson*

*This was the Holland School (below) prior to construction of the new brick school in 1914. This handsome building has served as a residence since that time.*



The **Myrtle School** was built by Calvin Archer between 1850-60 and was used into the 1920s. According to Robert Archer it was used for Sunday School by Western Branch, Bethlehem and Providence Churches immediately after the Civil War until those churches could be rebuilt or repaired. Demolished 1920s.



Some other early county-built white schools are still standing. **Bethlehem School** (above left), built in 1910 near Bethlehem Church, is still standing and used as a residence. The school at **Box Elder** (above right) is gone but a portion of the school complex is said to be incorporated in the community building seen here. Photos by Dana Adams



"Nansemond like other counties of Virginia has the difficult and expensive problem of maintaining a dual system of schools, i.e., white and negro. An earnest effort is made to give the negro boy and girl an opportunity to secure a common school education. There are thirty negro schools in the County in which there are seventy-five teachers." 1928 \*\*\*

**Schools for colored children** were woefully slow in coming. Public schooling was only offered to people of color through 7th grade until well into the 20th century.

In *Suffolk: A Pictorial History* by Hobbs and Pacquette, we read that the noted minister Israel Cross gave the land for **Marsh Hill School**, c 1908, and people in the community built the building with the understanding that the county would provide a teacher. That school later became a residence. Cross, a former slave, reportedly learned to read and write from white children. He eventually started Mt. Sinai Baptist Church and ended all his sermons with the words, "Buy some land, build a home, and get an education."

According to Ruby Walden at the time of school integration in the 1960s, many colored schools lacked indoor plumbing and one had a pump that came up through the middle of the floor.

According to one source **Savage Crossing School** near Manning Road was first a white school, then a colored school. It was listed as a colored school in 1922. It is reportedly still in use as a residence but cannot be seen from the road.



**Somerton Colored School**, built in 1900, still stands as a residence on Hwy. 13 not far from the North Carolina line. The current resident said his grandmother attended a two room school there.



**Greshen School (a/k/a Gresham School)**, on Old Mill Road in the Myrtle area, was a brick school built in 1922, perhaps with Rosenwald funds. It was used until the new Mount Zion School opened in the 1960s. Greshen was used as a Masonic lodge and a residence, then stood vacant for some time. The current owners intended to refurbish the old building but during the lengthy negotiations preceding the purchase, the roof fell in. The building was severely damaged. The owners built a new house on the footprint of the old school and incorporated what they could salvage from the old building.



Photos  
by  
Dana  
Adams

**Piney Grove School** (left) on Manning Road was originally called **Simon Reid School**. The Reid family transferred the property to the Holy Neck School District in 1909. The school closed in the late 1940s and has been a residence since then.

## Rosenwald Schools

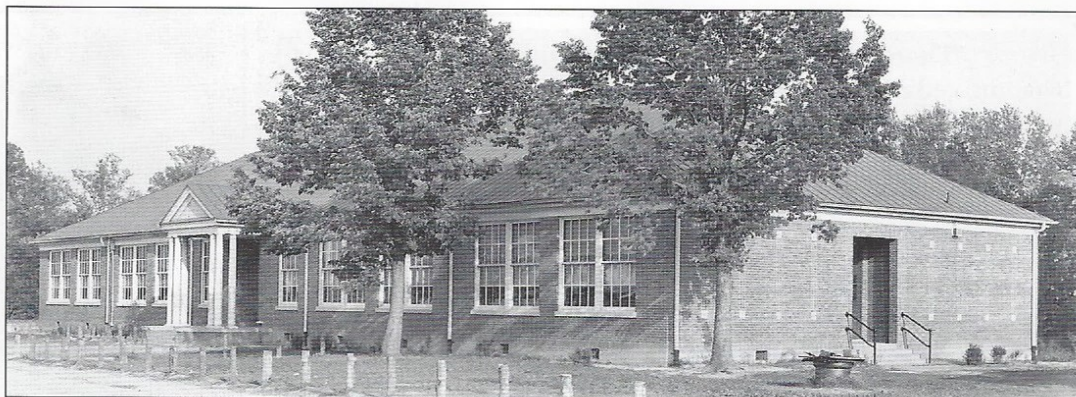
Born in Springfield, Illinois, merchant Julius Rosenwald became president of Sears, Roebuck and Company in the early twentieth century in the days when catalog shopping was a real boon to people in isolated rural areas. The Rosenwald Fund was established in 1917 for the well being of mankind. It provided private money for schools for African Americans in poor rural areas in the South. The money was to be matched by local funds, public and private, because he felt it wrong to give without expecting others to give, especially those who were being helped. The fund also provided plans for schools of all sizes from one teacher schools to 11 room buildings. Probably the most notable feature in all the plans was the big bank(s) of windows providing light and air. Eventually 364 Rosenwald schools were built in Virginia. According to one source there were eleven Rosenwald schools in Nansemond County (another source says seven).



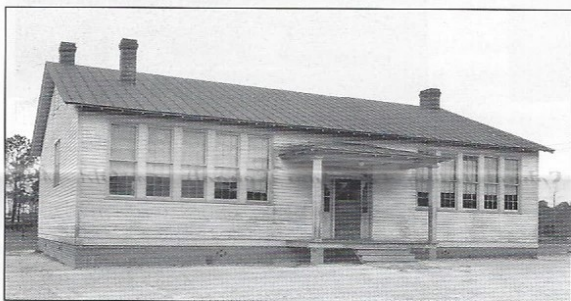
Julius Rosenwald (1862-1932)



**East Suffolk Elementary** (1924) / **East Suffolk High School** (1939) apparently started with a Rosenwald School and grew. It closed in the 1960s. After a variety of uses and then disuse it has been partially refurbished as a very fine community facility. (vintage photo)



**Sandy Bottom** is still in use as a fellowship hall.



**Oakland School** in Chuckatuck was apparently added to and covered over. It is believed by some that it still exists in the current Oakland School. (vintage photo)



**Holland Colored School** (built 1922) has been a residence since the school closed in the 1960s.

modern photos by Dana Adams

(Right) **Southwestern High School/Nansemond Training School** (1924) started as a Rosenwald School. The high school closed in the 1960s. An adjacent elementary school ~~was~~ <sup>is</sup> still in operation. ~~until this year~~. (vintage photo)

(Right) **Wilroy School** (1924) still stands on Milum Road. After a fire, repairs and alterations, it serves as a house of worship. (vintage photo)



## From Wilroy School

Mrs. Beatrice Boone Reeves attended **Wilroy School** (above). Her parents lacked the advantage of education beyond about the third grade. They encouraged their three children to learn, to be educated people. Mrs. Reeves was the oldest child. Her graduation from seventh grade at Wilroy School in 1937 was a major milestone in the family. She was the first to finish grammar school.

This might have been the end of education for the girl because there was no public higher education for people of color near enough to her home for her to attend. Her parents, however, were not to be deterred. She caught a ride to town daily and attended the private Nansemond Collegiate Institute until East Suffolk High School opened in 1939.

Mrs. Reeves went on to attend Elizabeth City State Teachers College and eventually received a master's degree. She and her siblings all became teachers.

Beatrice Boone eventually returned to teach at her alma mater, Wilroy School that she calls Rosenwald School. When she arrived to teach there, two teachers were expected to teach seven grades but they petitioned the school board and a third teacher was sent to the school. She taught in Southampton County for five years, the Nansemond County (and after the merger, Suffolk) system for 34 years and spent an additional 22 years as a substitute.

**Florence Graded School/Florence Bowser** near Driver was named for a long time principal.





"There are now (1927) ten white schools in the County. Six of these are high schools. Two of the high schools have Vocational Agricultural Departments and four have Vocational Home Economics Departments. All six schools are accredited by the State Department of Education. Two of the four remaining schools have three rooms and two have two rooms. All four of these have been standardized under the regulations of the State Board of Education. All white schools in the County have a term of nine full school months." 1928 \*\*\*

## Building and Busing

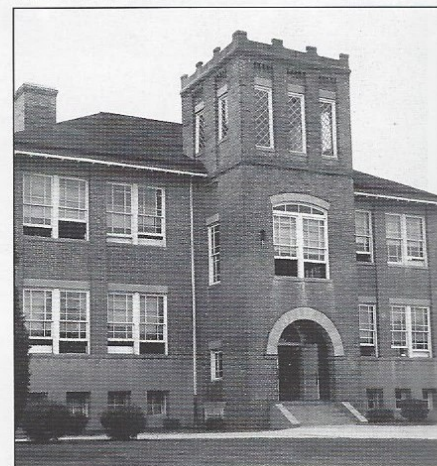
The advent of the school bus apparently brought the next big change. One room schools and even somewhat larger schools such as **Bethlehem** closed. White students were then bused to new larger schools at **Chuckatuck**, **Cypress Chapel**, **Holland**, **Kings Fork** and **Whaleyville**, all built roughly 1915-24. Some soon had second buildings.



*Cypress School — demolished.*



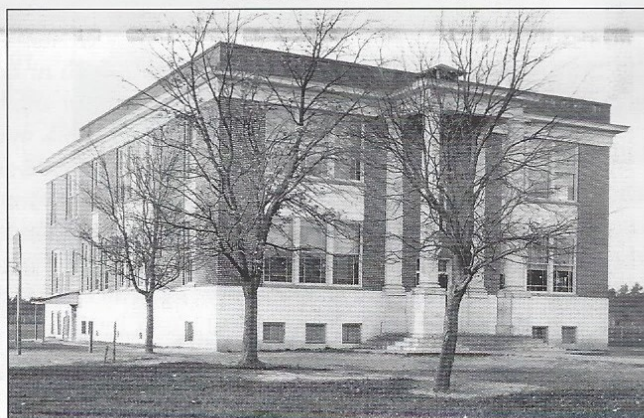
*Part of Chuckatuck School left, houses a business; building right — demolished*



*Holland School — lost to arson*



*Kings Fork — demolished*



*Whaleyville — demolished*



The most notable and arguably the best when it was built was the big **Second Congressional District Agricultural School** (left) built (probably with Federal funds) in **Driver** in 1912 and eventually named for J.E.L. DeJarnett, County School Superintendent (1913-1917). The late Hilda Wilroy Duke, who grew up at Wilroy, told of going there to school by horse and buggy, though some students came some distance and boarded at school or in Driver. The county school system was headquartered here for a while.

According to Judge William Wellington Jones the tower was removed in 1934 and the building was demolished about a quarter of a century later.



## More about Schoolhouses—

**Holland School** c 1904-1910. It is now a private residence. See p. 3 this issue. Vintage photo.



About **Magnolia School**, see back page this issue —

When we talked to John Bright about the location of the Magnolia School, he said that he couldn't vouch for the location of it but he remembers hearing from some older Magnolia citizens this story:

The citizens in question lived close enough to walk to school, say about half a mile. They were driven to school in a wagon every day, though, by a gun toting grown man. The bears were just too prevalent in that area for the children to walk to school safely.

### Candlelight Tour

**Wreath and Greens Fundraiser** — Please use the enclosed **wreath order form** to order wreaths and garlands by October 31—a later deadline this year.

Please plan to attend, support and/or work our **Tour**, December 3 & 4. It's our major fundraiser for the year. We're working with downtown churches, the Suffolk Center, and downtown merchants and restaurants as well as Riddick's Folly and the Train Station to make this a really fun and festive weekend to be downtown. Tickets go on sale November 1.

**Christmas Cocktail Party** — Save the date! Invitations will be sent to members soon for this party on Friday, December 2, 6:30-9:00, at the home of Linda and Hunter Odom.

**Provide things honest in the sight of all men** Romans 12:17 This quote appears on the gravestone in Cedar Hill of historian Wibur E. McClenny, born in Myrtle 1875. Like Mr. McClenny, we strive to record history as accurately and honestly as possible. To that end you will see two items marked out. We regret having to mar a nice piece of printing but we can't send out something that's wrong. Yes, we proofread but some things just escape detection.

#### Celebrate Halloween at **Riddick's Folly House Museum**

Readings from the Dark Side

Saturday October 29, 2:00 pm.

Admission — 2 cans of non-perishable food

Refreshments

Reservations required: phone 934-0822

or email: [rflcurator@verizon.net](mailto:rflcurator@verizon.net)





*We failed to include this in our Frightening the Horses issue. Perhaps it was behind the Clark Andrews show room on West Washington St.? Courtesy Kermit Hobbs*



### Bits and pieces from the Phillips-Dawson House:

- In the summer, a representative from Wells Fargo called us and described very specific kinds of images they wanted for a mural or montage for the bank at the corner of Main and Market Streets. It's really pretty handsome. Take a look next time you're downtown.
- In August the Norfolk & Western Historical Society invited us to speak about the history of railroads locally. Sue Woodward and Kate Cross made a presentation at their convention in Norfolk.
- We're finishing a project to update our wiring and install new outside lighting thanks to Rex Burden of Indian Trail Electric LLC and our projects man John Harrell.
- Also, look for a new sign out front in the next few weeks.
- Today (Oct. 10) we entertained the Western Tidewater Council for the Virginia Foundation for the Humanities at the Phillips-Dawson House. The council is made up of representatives from Southampton, Isle of Wight, Sussex, Surry and Suffolk.
- The 1890s doll house, formerly property of Bank Street native Bess Holland Creekmore, is being prepared for its grand unveiling as part of our 35th Annual Candlelight Tour on December 3 & 4. The house team consists of Lee King and Hazel and Jimmy White. Sid Thomas is making a display table. Thanks to all of the member volunteers for their time and good work.



*At our October meeting Fred Taylor, above, talks about the history of professional baseball in Suffolk.*

*Members and guests, below, enjoy refreshments. L-R: Austin Darden, Charles Bradshaw, Becky and Jimmy Bradshaw and Sandra Council.*



**We apologize for omitting members Paige & Marcus Pollard from the list of *Friends* on page 10.**



## The Teacherage

In the early days solo country teachers might have had a hard, lonely job. The female teacher generally was required to be single. Unless she taught in her home community and could live with her parents, she needed a place to live. Males as well were generally single. Having a place of one's own was out of the question--they weren't paid much and little or nothing was available.

In some cases the teachers boarded in country homes. And at some larger schools there was a teacherage--sort of a dormitory for the teachers, mostly young ladies. **Cypress** and **Driver** were the only county schools, to our knowledge, that had a teacherage.



Cypress Teacherage — demolished



Young teachers Nellie Beale and Nell Williams at their lodging at the Brothers house in Whaleyville late 1930s. Thanks to Charnell Williams Blair



Cypress teachers at the teacherage 1920s: Helen Woolford, E\_\_\_ Eason, Raye V. Knight, unknown, Anna L. Coggins

### In Whaleyville

"During the school year, Miss Frances Sadler, who taught first and second grades at the Whaleyville School, lived and boarded at Grandmother's. She was like family to us all. Grandmother sent her lunch every school day. Usually several high school students would come at lunch time to pick up her hot lunch--fried chicken, biscuits and vegetables were a typical lunch." From essay *Life in Whaleyville During World War II*, by Polly Brothers Simpson

### At Crittenden

"One of the most beloved teachers at the Crittenden School was Anne Everett Bagnell Jones, whose teaching career began in 1929 and spanned thirty years. . . . Mrs. Jones recalled that the rules for teachers were very strict in those days. Not only were the teachers required to be single and follow a very strict dress code, but it was also mandated that they spend every other weekend in the community attending every event held in church and socially throughout the villages. This strictness is a testament to the fact that it was important that their teachers be a true and integral part of community life." From *The River Binds Us*, by the people of Crittenden, Eclipse and Hobson

Note: It is also reported that Miss Everett started teaching for \$90 per month and during the Depression her salary dropped to \$70 per month.

We realize that there were (and are still standing) many more schools--some we know about and some we don't. We ran out of space and time. Please call with any new information.



## District School Boards and District Schools

The system of public schools evolved over time. Prior to 1922 there were five school districts in Nansemond County, each with its own school board. An act was passed in Virginia in March of 1922 that abolished the district school boards and created county boards. Accordingly, in August of that year the five Nansemond districts transferred all property to the county board (Nansemond County Deed Book 102, p. 84). The City of Suffolk had a separate school system.

The district school board members at that time were as follows:

<u>Holy Neck</u>	<u>Chuckatuck</u>	<u>Sleepy Hole</u>	<u>Cypress</u>	<u>Whaleyville</u>
J.R. Holland	L.L. Eley	John G. Eberwine	A.J. Rountree	H.H. Hunter
B.D. Jones	H.C. Hall	A.S. Hargroves	R.S. Holland	T.V. Arthur
Y.C. Byrd	S.L. McClenny	J.L. Bond	F.F. Brinkley	B.H. Doughtie

Here are the schools that were transferred. Some were known by other names at various times. They were, of course, segregated schools in 1922. C = colored; W = white

<u>Holy Neck</u>	<u>Chuckatuck</u>	<u>Sleepy Hole</u>	<u>Cypress Chapel</u>	<u>Whaleyville</u>
Holland (W)	Crittenden (W)	Driver (W)	Cypress Chapel (W)	Whaleyville High (W)
Holy Neck (W)	Chuckatuck (W)	Florence Graded (C)	Baines Hill (W)	Whaleyville Graded (C)
Box Elder (W)	Kings Fork (W)	Prospect (C)	Franklin Grove (W)	Liberty Spring (W)
South Quay (W)	Myrtle (W)	Huntersville (C)	White Marsh (W)	Somerton Graded (W)
Bethlehem (W)	Buckhorn (W)	Yates Bellville property	Clay Hill (C)	Cherry Grove (W)
Ocie Friendship (W)	Hobson (C)	Yates Driver property	East Suffolk (C)	Centennial (W)
Little Fork (C)	Chuckatuck (C)			Somerton (C)
Silver Spring (C)	Mt. Zion (C)			Harrells (C)
Marsh Hill (C)	Mill Road (C)			Hosier Lane (C)
Noah Howell (C)	Little Aid (C)			Pleasant Hill (C)
Copeland (C)				East Suffolk (C)
Savage Crossing (C)				
Simon Reid (C)				

NOTE: East Suffolk is shown in two districts in the Deed Book

## Consolidation

Schools and churches have long been the glue that holds communities together. As schools have become larger and larger, smaller schools have closed leaving a void in the community. This continues to occur.

In April 1925 W.J. Robertson, President of the Bethlehem School League (akin, perhaps, to a P.T.A?), beseeched the County School Board to leave Bethlehem open. The following were the reasons for the closing given by Superintendent R. M. Williams:

- 1st. The many advantages derived from a good consolidated school.
- 2nd. A bus will run on the new State Highway from the Southern R.R. to Cypress. This will put all pupils between this highway and the Suffolk-Holland Highway less than one and a half miles from a bus which will take them to a good consolidated school.
- 3rd. The attendance at the Bethlehem School has been so small for the past session that we are required, by law, to either close the school or make it a one teacher school. We feel that the latter would be a great mistake.

*Letter, Crumpler collection*

**HIGH SCHOOL TEACHERS**  
 MISS MARGARETE CORBITT, B. M.  
 ASSISTANT PRINCIPAL  
 MISS CHRISTINE GLADSTONE  
 HOME ECONOMICS  
 MISS NETTIE MARIE GRIFFIN  
 MISS HILDA MERRYMAN  
 SCHOOL NURSE

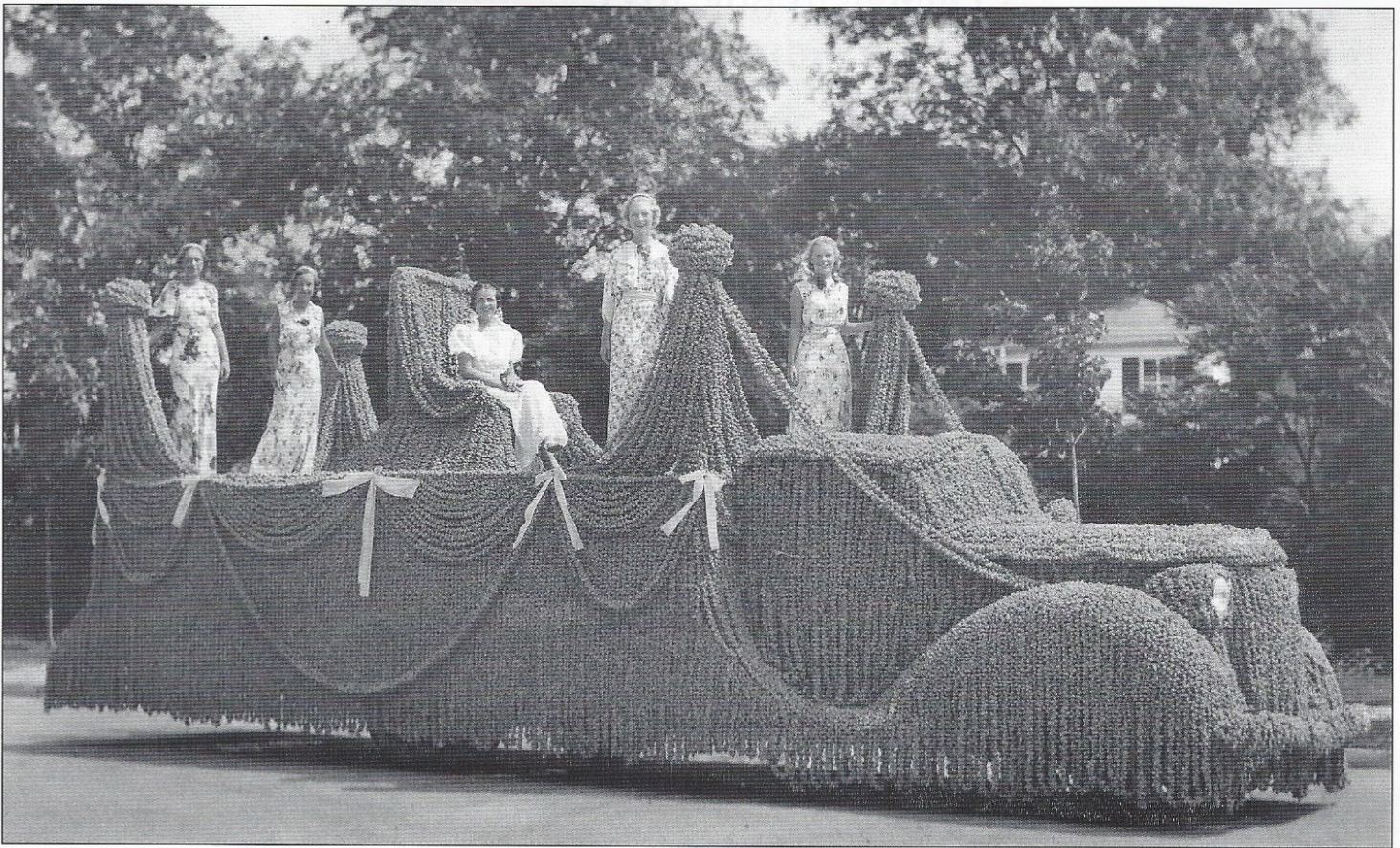
**Cypress High School**  
 MISS SUSIE LYNTON RABEY PRINCIPAL  
 Cypress Chapel, Va.

**ELEMENTARY TEACHERS**  
 MISS ELSIE MAE ROGERS  
 MISS ELIZABETH STUART  
 MISS OLIVE CLAYTON  
 MISS LOUISE HENDRICKS  
 MISS MARY GOBBEL  
 PROF. MARK BENYUNES  
 VIOLIN

April 30, 1923

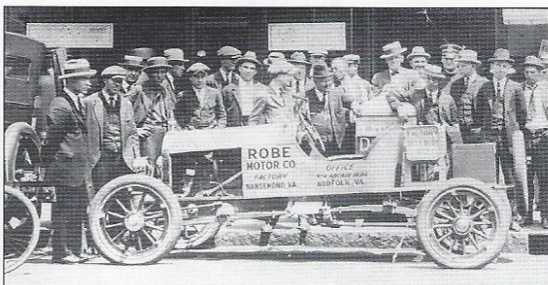
The first senior class of Cypress High School graduated May 29, 1923. Letterhead, Crumpler collection





Sept. 9, 1936—75 years ago this month. We were glad to receive a Sept. 9, 1936, Suffolk News-Herald that told us about this great picture that we've had for a while. This was Suffolk's float for the National Tobacco Festival in South Boston, Virginia. Elsie Berry Yates (center) was Miss Suffolk. At the back of the float are (L-R) Marjorie Nimmo and Frances Stallings. Mary George Gay and Helen Clark are at the front. The float was designed by G.A. Nimmo who supervised three skilled women from Planters Nut and Chocolate Co. who strung together 250,000 peanuts provided by American Peanut Corp., Parker Peanut Co., Planters Nut and Chocolate Co., Pond Brothers Peanut Co., and Suffolk Peanut Co. The truck was provided by Clark-Andrews Motor Co. This must have been quite a sight driving to South Boston.

## Postscripts to our July 2011 Frightening the Horses issue:



\* John Bright responded to our request for information about **Robe cars**. He grew up in Magnolia which was not far from the location of the Robe factory.

It was his understanding that the factory was to be the centerpiece of a community to be built in that part of the Dismal Swamp that lies between Magnolia and Driver.

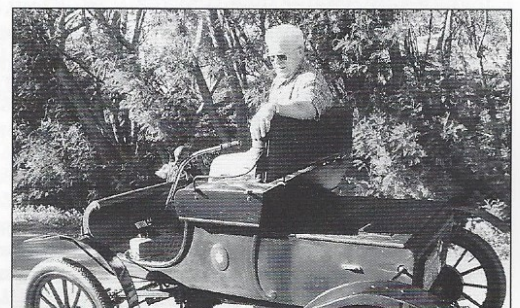
John said that streets (dirt roads) were laid out in a grid around the factory. A few years ago those unpaved streets were still visible. It is his understanding that the car was used as a public relations tool. It was driven and displayed around the countryside and building lots surrounding the factory were offered for sale at a low price. Some people bought lots sight unseen. John says

that, reportedly, a few people came to town, went out to look at the site and just considered that money down the drain.

Was it a scam or just a plan that didn't work? Maybe we'll never know.

\* John Harrell told us that coming up the Main St. hill from the river was very difficult for most cars in the early 20th century. They just lacked power. John said his father told him that most people backed up that hill as reverse had more power.

\* Andy Maxey tells us that the first car in Suffolk was a one, not two, cylinder Oldsmobile. It was like the car shown right that Andy encountered on a trip to California. One can plainly see this was not a substantial vehicle





# Thanks to our 2011 Members

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## News from Your Train Station

We had a great summer at the Station, with average attendance on Saturdays well over 100 guests from a variety of different cities, many of whom were visiting the Farmers Market. We still have many people from Suffolk visit us for the first time.

Preservation of Historic Suffolk hired J.C. Smith Contracting to make some much needed repairs to the Station. We are pleased and grateful that hurricane Irene did not cause any damage to the building. The Norfolk and Western Historical Society visited this summer and they were very impressed with the restoration, the model, and the slide show Tommy Arthur prepared for this group. We will be able to use this slide presentation for future special occasions.

Our gift shop continues to be well stocked with unique and special items, such as Robert Burnell's giclée print of the Station, 2 new books on the Virginian Railroad, new train toys and children's books. We continue to carry many SNHS publications and other history related books.

**Our Christmas Open House is November 5, 10:00 am—4:00 pm,** and we are looking forward to being a part of the Candlelight Tour. Our gift shop helps SNHS keep our doors open. As you do your fall cleaning, don't forget to donate items for our "collectible corner."

Hope you will visit the Station for these upcoming events. Don't forget to buy your Candlelight Tour tickets here.



*Kimberly schoolhouse, source and date unknown*

## Corrections —

- From our June 2008 issue: Suffolk Coca Cola was sold in 1977 to Crass (not Cross) Bottling Company of Richmond.
- Also, on the last page of the new *Suffolk Living* L.H. Cathey was misidentified.





*Old Magnolia School on Wilroy Rd., believed to have been on the site where Magnolia Church (now demolished) later stood. Can readers shed light on the subject? Does someone have a better photo of this school?*

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*School bus and students at Whaleyville School late 1930s. Thanks to Charnell Williams Blair*